

**STATEMENT OF THE ENEWETAK/UJELANG LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCIL  
SUBMITTED TO THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

June 26, 1996

Submitted by the Honorable Ismael John, Senator, Nitijela of the Marshall Islands; and  
The Honorable Neptali Peter, Mayor of Enewetak Atoll

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of this Committee:

Thank you for providing this opportunity to the people of Enewetak to submit a statement in support of the amendments contained in Senate Bill 1804 relating to (1) the Marshall Islands Agricultural and Food Programs and (2) the Bikini and Enewetak Medical Care. These amendments are crucial to us inasmuch as they affect our ability to live on Enewetak Atoll. Enewetak atoll remains affected by residual radiation. Little land is available for food producing purposes. Our population is increasing which places a greater strain on the limited resources available to us. Living in an environment affected by radiation requires adequate health care.

Below we more fully describe why these amendments are necessary. We also take this opportunity to describe to this Committee the initiatives we have taken these past few years to improve food production on our atoll, and to improve the health and education of our people. These initiatives include a complete overhaul of our agriculture program; the institution of a nutrition education program; the renovation of a three story building which now houses our sixteen classroom elementary school; the hiring of two highly qualified American teachers to help us with our education effort; and, attempts at economic development of our atoll.

**Background.** Enewetak Atoll was the site of 43 of the 66 nuclear tests conducted by the United States in the Marshall Islands between 1948 and 1958. One of the tests was especially significant as it was the first test of a experimental thermonuclear device (hydrogen bomb). This test occurred on October 31, 1952 and was known as the "Mike" test. The test had a yield of 10.4 megatons (750 times greater than the Hiroshima bomb). The Mike test vaporized a number of islands, leaving a crater more than a mile in diameter and 200 feet deep.

The 43 nuclear tests conducted at Enewetak were detonated in the air, on towers, on the surface of islands and reefs, on barges, and underwater. Some of the "ground zeros," or surface level explosions, were on the islands themselves, some were on the reef, some were in the lagoon, and one was in the ocean nearby. In addition, two plutonium experiments were conducted on the island of Runit in which the devices did not fully detonate but instead sprayed chunks of plutonium across the island. Nuclear testing on Enewetak ended with the last Operation HARDTACK test on August 18, 1958.

The Nuclear Testing Program inflicted serious damage to Enewetak Atoll. Five islands in the atoll were completely or partially vaporized by the nuclear tests. The remaining islands on the north half of the atoll, where the nuclear testing had actually occurred, including the major

residential island of Enjebi, were heavily contaminated with radioactivity, as was the island of Runit. Debris and wreckage -- radioactive and nonradioactive -- littered many of the islands. The atoll's lagoon was seriously damaged. Large bomb craters covered many of the islands. The southern islands of Enewetak and Medren were mostly covered by concrete and asphalt since they were used for various facilities required by the Nuclear Testing Program, including concrete foundations, roads, airstrips, and an airport. As a result, the entire atoll was agriculturally devastated: vegetation was completely stripped from many of the islands, and nearly all plants of agricultural and economic value on the atoll were totally destroyed.

In December of 1947, prior to the testing program, the United States relocated us to a small and remote atoll 120 miles southwest of Enewetak. That atoll is named Ujelang. Ujelang atoll has a land area less than one-fourth that of Enewetak, and a lagoon less than one-sixteenth that of Enewetak. The suffering and hardship we experienced at Ujelang is well documented and ultimately resulted in a commitment by the United States to resettle us at our home atoll of Enewetak.

In order to permit us to return to our ancestral homeland, the United States, between 1977 and 1980, undertook a resettlement program which included revegetation of the atoll. Crops of coconut, pandanus, breadfruit, taro, bananas and lime were planted beginning in 1979 and the plantings continue as part of the Enewetak Food and Agriculture Program. The crops have never produced the projected quantity of food and do not now provide sufficient food for our population. The problem is significant since less than 400 acres out of the total of over 1600 acres of the atoll can be used for food production. We cannot harvest the food crops of the northern islands of the atoll due to the relatively high level of radiation in these foods.

The United States Congress recognized our predicament and in Section 103(h) of the Compact of Free Association Act of 1985, Public Law 99-239, authorized funding for the Enewetak Food and Agriculture Program. The funding level has been at approximately \$1.091 million annually since FY 1987.

**Section 103(h) of Public Law 99-239.** Mr. Chairman, we wish to express our gratitude to the United States Congress for the appropriation of funds these past ten years for the Enewetak Food and Agriculture Program pursuant to Section 103(h) of Public Law 99-239, as amended. We are also grateful that the Administration has included funding in the amount of approximately \$1.091 million for the Enewetak Food and Agriculture Program in its FY 1997 Budget. However, we must note that the \$1.091 million in the Administration's budget is the same amount as the amount appropriated in FY 1987. That is, the funding for the program has substantially declined these past 10 years in real dollars. Applying a 3.5% inflation factor, the \$1.091 million appropriated in 1987 now has the purchasing power of approximately \$720,000. In short, the program over the years has experienced over a 33% cut in funding. At the same time, our population has increased from approximately 1,400 persons to over 1,800 persons. We have been successful in employing strategies to cut costs and to maximize the funds available to us. However, for the program to achieve its intended purpose, funding needs to be increased to

at least keep pace with inflation. Consequently, we ask that the amount of \$1.5 million be appropriated for the Enewetak Food and Agriculture Program to reflect the impact of inflation on the \$1.091 million over the past 10 years. (Applying a 3.5% inflation factor to the \$1.091 million for the past ten years results in an amount of approximately \$1.5 million.).

In addition, we note that authorization for funding of the Enewetak Food and Agriculture Program expires at the end of this fiscal year. The Congress anticipated the necessity for continued funding when it stated in Section 103(h)(3) of Public Law 99-239:

"Payments under this subsection shall be provided to such extent or in such amounts as are necessary for services and other assistance provided pursuant to this subsection. It is the sense of Congress that after the periods of time specified in paragraphs (1) and (2) of this subsection, consideration will be given to such additional funding for these programs as may be necessary."

Of equal significance is the language of Senate Concurrent Resolution 171-2 in which the Congress stated:

"It is the sense of the Congress that the special medical care and logistical support program for Rongelap and Utrik and for the agriculture and food programs for Enewetak and Bikini described in section 103(h) of Public Law 99-239 represent special and continuing moral commitments of the United States and will be funded to the extent of the need of the populations of such atolls for such assistance."

Accordingly, we trust that the Congress will amend Section 103(h)(2) of Public Law 99-239 (Compact of Free Association Act of 1985) to authorize funding for an additional five years, to FY 2001, as proposed in the amendment before this committee. We also trust that the funding level will be increased to reflect the increase in the population of the atolls and to reflect the impact of inflation on the program's funding.

**Enewetak Food and Agriculture Program.** The Enewetak Food and Agriculture Program enables us to live on Enewetak. It provides funding for imported food, continued agriculture rehabilitation, operation of a motor vessel which brings us the imported food, a nutrition education program, and an operation and maintenance component conducted out of a facility on Enewetak known as the field station.

1. **Efforts made to increase food production.** We were unhappy with the state of the agriculture rehabilitation program when we inherited the program from the Department of Energy. Accordingly, in 1993 we had an assessment of our agriculture situation conducted by experts affiliated with the University of Hawaii, the University of the South Pacific, and the College of Micronesia. The purpose of such assessment was to determine the current agriculture situation and to develop a plan for increased food production. The plan was completed and implementation occurred in late summer 1993. Further revisions of the plan have occurred, all with the goal of providing greater local fresh food for our population. The implementation of the

plan is progressing. Significant planting of food crops has occurred with additional planting to occur over the next several years.

2. Importation of food. Imported food is required because of the poor soil condition of the land available to us and the radiation contamination of other lands. Since we have taken over the program we have increased the quantity of imported food by 50% without any increase in the overall program budget. We have accomplished this by utilizing bidding procedures for food purchases; elimination of transportation charges by use of our motor sailer (Wetak II); elimination of import tax on food; and reduction of other program expenses.

3. Nutrition education program. Since our people cannot rely on traditional foods we must import food, the nutritional value of which is unfamiliar to us. Several years ago we became aware that some of our people, particularly our children, suffered from malnutrition. Accordingly, we instituted a nutrition education program. We are pleased to report that we have been apprised by physicians that malnutrition among our children has been greatly reduced.

4. Wetak II (waterborne transportation). The Wetak II is used at an ever increasing frequency. We now have our imported food purchases shipped to Ebeye Island, Kwajalein Atoll from which our fifty foot motor sailer, the Wetak II, picks up the shipments. The distance is 350 miles one way. The voyage in such a craft is not comfortable. We are extremely proud of the hard work and perseverance of our local crew and local captain in carrying out this assignment. Transportation of food in this manner permits us to save substantial shipping costs.

5. Field Station. Operation and maintenance of the entire program is conducted out of a facility referred to as the Field Station. The machinery and equipment required by the agriculture, food and transportation components of the program are kept at the Field Station. Field Station personnel provide all the required agricultural work; maintain, service, and operate the equipment required by the various components of the program; make payments and maintain books of accounts; and coordinate the procurement of food, material and equipment.

The overall manager of the program is Johnson Hernest. Other management personnel include Samson Yoshitaro and Mathan David. The program employs 39 full and part-time employees.

Radiological Monitoring and Health Care. We have noticed an increase in the incidence of thyroid nodules and cancers in our population. Accordingly, we must be assured that our people are adequately monitored on a whole body basis and for plutonium inhalation or ingestion. Similarly, we must be assured that the environmental monitoring of residual radionuclides in the soil continue at the frequency and type of work indicated by the Department of Energy. We also note that we were told that the Defense Nuclear Agency was curtailing its monitoring activities of the Runit nuclear waste containment site (the Dome). We consider the monitoring of the Runit dome to be a continuing responsibility of the United States. Accordingly, we asked that an agency of the U.S. assess the current condition of the dome and its effect on the surrounding environment. In addition, we asked that a plan for the long term monitoring of the dome be developed. We understand that the assessment work has begun. We trust that the remainder of our request will also be undertaken by the U.S.

Our concerns regarding the exposure of our people to radiation is underscored by the perception of our people of radiation contamination from the fallout of the 1952 Mike test while

we were living on Ujelang Atoll. This perception, and the fact that our people reside on an atoll that contains residual radiation, emphasizes the need for better monitoring and better medical care of our population than has occurred to date. We are included in the 177 Health Care Program (also known as the Four Atoll Health Care Program). However, that program is burdened by an enrollment of over 11,000 persons which limits the medical care available to our population. In fact, the administrator of the program has calculated that the program is able to spend only \$11.00 per person per month. Clearly, such an amount is inadequate to provide any semblance of adequate medical care let alone the type of care required by a population resettled on an atoll that contains residual radiation from the testing program. We trust that the amendment proposed by this Committee would include the funding necessary for an adequate health care program for our people as envisioned by the Congress in Public Law 95-134 and Public Law 96-205.

**Environmental Situation.** The issues that we have mentioned above are directly related to the environmental condition of Enewetak. Seventy-five percent of our atoll remains unavailable to us because of radiation contamination. We are trying to do the best we can with the little arable land available to us. However, the real issue for our long-term well-being is the environmental remediation of our entire atoll so that all of it can be used without fear of increased health risk from radiation contamination.

We are aware of the commendable efforts made in the United States to cleanup radiation contaminated sites. Oakridge, Tennessee is undergoing environmental remediation at a cost of several hundred million dollars per year and cleanup is projected to require thirty years of such effort. Other sites such as Hanford, Rocky Flats and Los Alamos are just a few of the areas receiving environmental cleanup. We understand that the standards to which the contaminated areas in the United States are being cleaned-up are standards much more stringent than those employed in the cleanup of Enewetak. For example, the dome on Runit island on our atoll is used to store radioactive material collected from throughout our atoll. We understand that the storage of such material in the manner stored on Runit would not be permitted in the United States. Furthermore, the dome is only a small portion of Runit. The remainder of Runit is contaminated with the extremely dangerous radioactive element, plutonium. Although we understand that the United States intended to cleanup those plutonium affected areas of Runit, no such cleanup ever took place. Worse, no effort was ever taken to ensure that adequate warnings, fencing and other methods generally used for the protection of people from contamination were maintained and/or put in place. We understand that this situation would not be permitted in the United States.

Runit is but one example of how the cleanup methods used on Enewetak differ from those later employed in the United States. Another example is the level to which the land itself would be cleaned up to allow full and unrestricted use. The level of cleanup employed on Enewetak does not permit full and unrestricted use of large portions of our atoll. It appears to us that within a few years, our fellow islanders, the Bikini people, will have a much greater use of their atoll than we will have. We are happy for the Bikinians because we also experienced the displacement and loss of homeland experienced by them. However, we believe that our

environmental situation must be addressed to permit us to make as much use of our atoll as possible.

**Education Rehabilitation.** Several years ago we became concerned with the educational system on Enewetak Atoll. We had an assessment of our education situation conducted. As a result of that assessment, we hired two very qualified American teachers to assist us in upgrading our elementary school. We are very pleased with the development of our education program and the enthusiasm for learning that such program has engendered in our schoolchildren and community. In addition to a new and more effective education program, we rehabilitated a three story structure which is now used as a sixteen classroom elementary school for our 320 schoolchildren. We are proud that our new school building is one of the finest such facilities in Micronesia.

**Economic Development.** We are attempting to have Enewetak developed as a fishing base and transshipment facility. Enewetak seems to be in a good location for such an enterprise. In addition, there are some existing facilities (runway and fuel tanks) which could be upgraded to facilitate economic development. A feasibility study and business plan was completed and we are negotiating with an interested private sector operator. Unfortunately, there is concern about the residual radiation on the Atoll and the perception in the Japanese market of radiation contamination on Enewetak atoll. This concern and perception underscores the need to finish the environmental clean-up of the Atoll.

**Conclusion.** In closing, we thank this Committee for proposing the amendments and we support the amendments as described in this statement.